## AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1-7 (Canceled)

8. (Previously presented) A method of nucleic acid delivery to target cells of a subject comprising the step of administering a conjugating agent-nucleic acid complex where the conjugating agent comprises $A–R_1–Q–Z_n$; where $R_1$ is a cholesterol derivative; a $C_8$-$C_{24}$ alkyl; $C_8$-$C_{24}$ heteroatom substituted alkyl wherein the heteroatom is O, N, or S; or a bile acid; where Q is a sulfur, nitrogen, or oxygen; and Z is a polyionic peptide and where A is a hydrophilic moiety is $C_0$-$C_4$ alkyl-hydroxy, -substituted amino, -quaternary amino, -sulfonate, -phosphonate, -carboxylate or a target ligand with the proviso that when A is the $C_0$-$C_4$ alkyl-hydroxy, Q is oxygen.

9. (Previously presented) The method of claim 8, wherein said administration is oral.

10. (Previously presented) The method of claim 8, wherein nucleic acid of said complex is expressed as a protein in said target cells.

11. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10 wherein said protein is secreted from said target cells.

12. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10 wherein said protein is of a class selected from the group consisting of: proteases, pituitary hormones, protease inhibitors, growth factors, cytokines, somatomedians, chemokines, immunoglobulins, gonadotrophins, interleukins, chemotactins, interferons, and lipid-binding proteins.

13. (Previously presented) The method of claim 8 wherein nucleic acid of said complex is selected from the group consisting of: DNA, RNA, mRNA, miRNA, ribozyme, and antisense sequences.

14. (Previously presented) The method of claim 8 wherein said complex is administered as part of a pharmaceutical composition.

15. (Previously presented) The method of claim 14 wherein said pharmaceutical composition comprises an active therapeutic compound.

16. (Previously presented) The method of claim 15 wherein said therapeutic compound is selected from the group consisting of: an antibiotic, a gamma or beta radiation emitting species, an anti-inflammatory, an antitumoral, an antiviral, an antibody, a hormone, an enzyme, antigenic peptide and antigenic protein.

17. (Previously presented) The method of claim 8 wherein $R_1$ is a cholesterol derivative.

18. (Canceled)

19. (Previously presented) The method of claim 8, wherein said target cells are gastrointestinal cells.

20. (Currently amended) A nucleic acid delivery composition comprising a conjugating agent-nucleic acid complex having the formula:

$A—R_1—Q—Y—Z$

where $R_1$ is a cholesterol derivative; a $C_8$-$C_{24}$ alkyl; $C_8$-$C_{24}$ heteroatom substituted alkyl wherein the heteroatom is O, N or S; or a bile acid; ~~where A is a hydrophilic moiety that illustratively includes C0-C4 alkyl hydroxy, substituted amino, quaternary amino, sulfonate, phosphonate, carboxylate or a target ligand;~~ where Q is sulfur, nitrogen, or oxygen; where Y is a linker peptide having a negative, neutral, or positive charge; and where Z is a polyionic peptide ~~with the proviso that when A is the C0-C4 alkyl hydroxy, Q is oxygen~~ and where A is a hydrophilic moiety is $C_0$-$C_4$ alkyl-hydroxy, -substituted amino, -quaternary amino, -sulfonate, -phosphonate, -carboxylate or a target ligand with the proviso that when A is the $C_0$-$C_4$ alkyl-hydroxy, Q is oxygen.

21. (Previously presented) The composition of claim 20 wherein said cholesterol derivative is selected from the group consisting of: cholestanol, coprostanol, cholic acid, glycocholic acid, chenodeoxycholic acid, desoxycholic acid, glycochenodeoxycholic acid, taurocholic acid, and taurochenodeoxycholic acid.

22. (Previously presented) The composition of claim 20 wherein said cholesterol derivative is a cholic acid or a deoxycholic acid.

23. (Previously presented) The composition of claim 20 wherein said A is $C_0$-$C_4$ alkyl-hydroxy.

24. (Previously presented) The composition of claim 20 wherein said Q is oxygen.

25. (Canceled)

26. (Previously presented) The composition of claim 20 wherein Z is polycationic.

27. (Previously presented) The composition of claim 26 wherein Z contains at least six residues.

28-29 (Canceled)

30. (Previously presented) A commercial package comprising a composition of A–$R_1$–Q–Z according to claim 8 as an active ingredient together with instructions for the use thereof as a nucleic acid delivery agent to a subject.